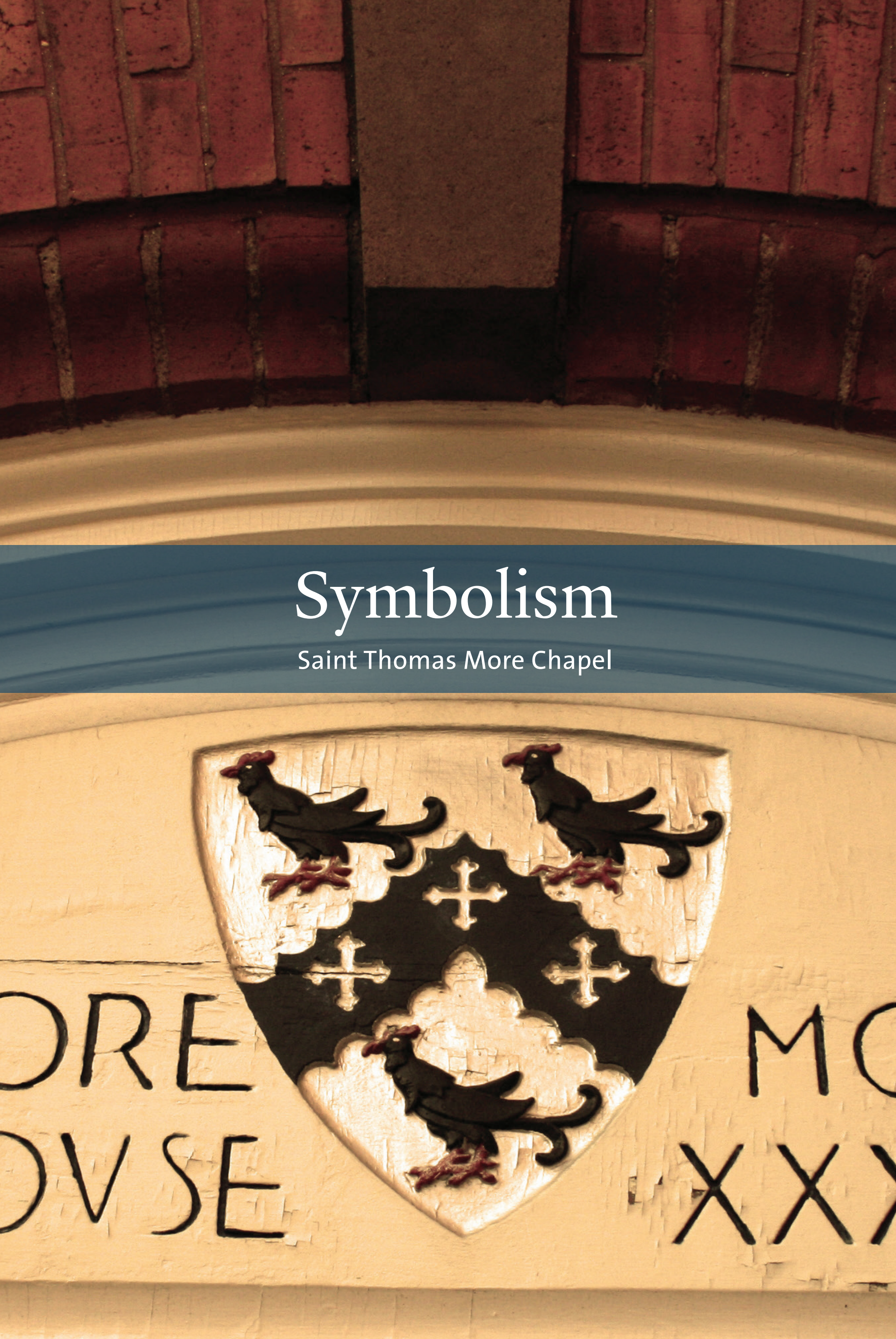
Symbolism

Saint Thomas More Chapel



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Saint Thomas More Chapel


D·O·M
SVB INVOCATIONE
SANCTI THOMÆ MORI
MARTYRIS
SAINT THOMAS MORE

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Introduction

An unassuming presence on one of the quieter streets of downtown New Haven, Connecticut, Saint Thomas More Chapel is the home of Yale's Roman Catholic community. When the chapel was dedicated in the autumn of 1938, just two blocks from the heart of Old Campus, it must have generated something of a stir among those accustomed to more traditional Catholic forms. Designed by William Douglas and the office of Douglas Orr, the chapel sought to temper the gravity of traditional brick masonry with a new openness to space and light, its large, clear cut-glass windows flooding the nave with light that worked its way across the walls through the changing moods of the day. While unusually spare in its overall conception, the interior was enriched with a few carefully considered highlights — canopied altar, high pulpit, chandeliers — each handled with imagination and extravagant artistic freedom.

The chapel was renovated following the liturgical changes of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) during the chaplaincy of Rev. Richard Russell (1964-1989). Following the dedication of the Thomas E. Golden, Jr. Center in 2006, the chapel was again renovated during the chaplaincy of Rev. Robert Beloin (1994-current). This latest renovation was made possible by a gift of Joseph J. Vale '63 in honor of his parents, Hon. Jerome and Jean G. Vale.

The chapel of Saint Thomas More was dedicated on October 9, 1938. The architect worked closely with the chapel's founder and first chaplain, Reverend T. Lawrason Riggs '10, who had long hoped for and planned such a place of worship.



Next to the south side of the chapel is the grave of Thomas Lawrason Riggs (1888-1943).


·D·O·M·
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SANCTI THOMÆ MORI
MARTYRIS

Exterior

The red-brick facade is decorated with the coats of arms of the Pope and of the Bishop of Hartford who were in office when the chapel was built: to the left as you face the building is the coat of arms of Pope Pius XI and to the right, that of Bishop Maurice McAuliffe.



The chapel's coat of arms is those of its patron saint with the addition of three crosses in the scalloped blue shield.

Over the chapel entrance, modeled by Joseph Colletti, an aluminum statue of Saint Thomas More by Robert Robbins stands in the center of a broken pediment. Wearing the robes and chain of office of the Lord Chancellor of England, Thomas More holds a book — probably the prayer book that was his companion during his imprisonment in the Tower of London. This heavily annotated volume is preserved in Yale's Beinecke Library, as is a first edition, 1516, of *Utopia*, Saint Thomas More's best-known writing.

There is the suggestion of a halo in the pattern of the bricks behind the saint's head. Beneath the figure are two large palm branches, symbol of the triumph of martyrdom, and on top of each pilaster framing the door is a dolphin, symbol of resurrection and salvation. The broken pediment carries two small palm trees, which are sometimes known as the Tree of Paradise. There is a legend that during the flight into Egypt a palm tree bent down to offer its fruit to the Holy Family and was rewarded by the promise of being planted in Paradise.

The inscription:
DOM (Deo Optimo Magno) Sub Invocatione Sancti Thomae Mori Martyris — "To the Most High God under the Invocation of Saint Thomas More Martyr".


At each corner of the spire atop the chapel steeple stands an angel with folded wings and outspread hands. The work of Robert Robbins.



Entrance 799
Gloria
Psalm 57
Preparation 811
Sanctus 445
Agnus Dei 472
Communion 536
Meditation 840
Recessional 805

Sanctuary

The 2008 renovation provided the opportunity to design a new suite of liturgical furniture — baptistry, altar, ambry and ambo with sounding board — to replace elements dating to the 1970s that had proved foreign to the vocabulary of the chapel. The forms of these new pieces sought to restore focus and to reintroduce those moments of close attention originally intended to offset the simplicity of the whole. In sympathy with the language of the architecture, their materials and profiles, while classical, embody the freshness and playfulness of the 1930s transitional moment, the juxtaposition of modern planes and baroque curves, of exposed materials and gilded highlights.

Designs were developed through sketches, drawings, models, and full-scale mock-ups that required close collaboration among the university community, the architect, and the craftspeople at every stage of the work. The baptistry in particular, despite its modest size, was among the project's most complex elements, requiring tight coordination within stringent parameters. Gilded detail at a new inset niche over the baptistry continued the chapel's tradition of hand-painted lettering.



Baptistry



Altar



The Ambo, Canopy and Dove with the Lady Chapel to the right.



Crucifix



Different from works of art in general, the theme of the crucifixion requires specific forms of consideration. The artist must incorporate into his work both functionality and a universally approved iconography that communicates a divine message to religious and nonreligious people alike.

Giuseppe Maraniello chose to concentrate on the stigmata: creating nails, shaped as double cones polished with a mirror finish, traversing Christ's body. For the artist, the stigmata represent the cruelest physical suffering that Christ endured, a suffering also shown on His face, with His gaze turned toward His people, watching over them. His eyes, without pupils, are empty as though to absorb the evil of the world. The image, recognized throughout the world, is of suffering. At the same time, there is serenity because through sacrifice has come an ultimate triumph.



The cross was built out of scraps of wood, recycled from the hard work of others, aged by the passage of time. On the upper part of the cross, in spite of the nails, Jesus leans forward to meet His people and His hands turn upward to meet His Father. A subtle outline of a dove takes flight from His left hand, symbolizing the Holy Spirit. The presence of the dove calls to mind the words of Saint John: "Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." John 19:30.



The journey of every human person is reflected in this work of art. United with Christ, death is not the last word. The destiny of every human person is eternal life.

Of all sacred images, the 'figure of the precious, life-giving cross of Christ' is pre-eminent, because it is the symbol of the entire Paschal mystery. The cross is the image most cherished by the Christian people and the most ancient; it represents Christ's suffering and victory and at the same time, as the Fathers of the Church have taught, it points to his Second Coming.

USCCB: Book of Blessings, n. 1233

The cross with the image of Christ crucified is a reminder of Christ's Paschal mystery. It draws us into the mystery of suffering and makes tangible our belief that our suffering when united with the passion and death of Christ leads to redemption.

USCCB: Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship, n. 91






ELISEI
EIVS·ALWINÆ
AVE

Lady Chapel

The small chapel on the north side of the building is dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was given by Father Riggs in memory of his brother, Francis Elisha Riggs, and his brother's wife, Alwina Bohlen Riggs.

The altar, made of marble and painted plaster, is probably Italian, late XVIth or early XVIIth-century. Across the front are four cherubim with folded wings. The center panel holds the word AVE ("Hail"), the angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary at the Annunciation, beneath a radiant star representing the Virgin.



Detail of one of the four cherubim

In the niche to the left of the altar is a statue, probably Italian XVIth-century, of Saint Anne and the Virgin. The child Mary presents a basket of fruits to her mother. The limestone figures carry traces of red, blue and gold paint. Beneath the niche is a design based on the Riggs coat of arms, including three water spaniels with bird bolts (thick, blunt-headed arrows) in their mouths and the words *Recte Age Nil Time* ("Do Right Fear Nothing").



Saint Anne and the Virgin

From the chapel's ceiling hang two votive ships, modern replicas of the Ark and the Dove, vessels that landed in Maryland in 1634, bringing the first Catholics to America. Such votive ships used to be offered by seamen in gratitude for safe voyages; here they are an offering for the first coming of the faith to America.



One of the ships that hang on each side of the Lady Chapel

The painting is a replica of the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico, site of the shrine honoring an apparition of the Virgin.

Below at the left is Pope Benedict XIV, who named her patroness of Mexico, and at the right is a figure representing the Mexican emperor. Beside him is a cartouche containing a crown and an eagle with a serpent in its mouth, symbol of the native Mexican state. Surrounding Mary are eight figures, including two cherubs, offering crowns, and in the rococo asymmetrical painted frames bordering the painting are represented various apparitions of the Virgin and the story of the miracle.

An inscription at the bottom tells the story of the apparition. It reads, in translation from the Spanish: “As the Indian Juan Diego was going along the slope of a hill, about one league from the Imperial Court of Mexico, Most Holy Mary appeared to him and commanded him to go tell the bishop that a temple should be built on this site. The Indian went and asked for an audience with the bishop. Roses, meanwhile, had blossomed suddenly on that barren hillside that day, the 12th of December 1531. With her divine hand, she gathered some into his ayate (which is a cape of coarse linen). In giving the bundle of roses to the bishop, the edges of the cape slipped open. Some of the roses fell, but others remained painted and engraved with the sovereign image on the cape just as it is venerated today, for the multitude of holes has not marred the rare perfection and beauty of the garment nor has the image formed by roses faded for hundreds of years.”



Pope Benedict XIV


MARIA
SS. DE MEXICO


IC XC
NI KA

Alcove

In the chapel alcove hangs a wooden cross, and the oval contour of the world encloses that cross. The Greek letters *ICXC/NIKA*, known as a Christogram, stand for "Jesus Christ conquers."

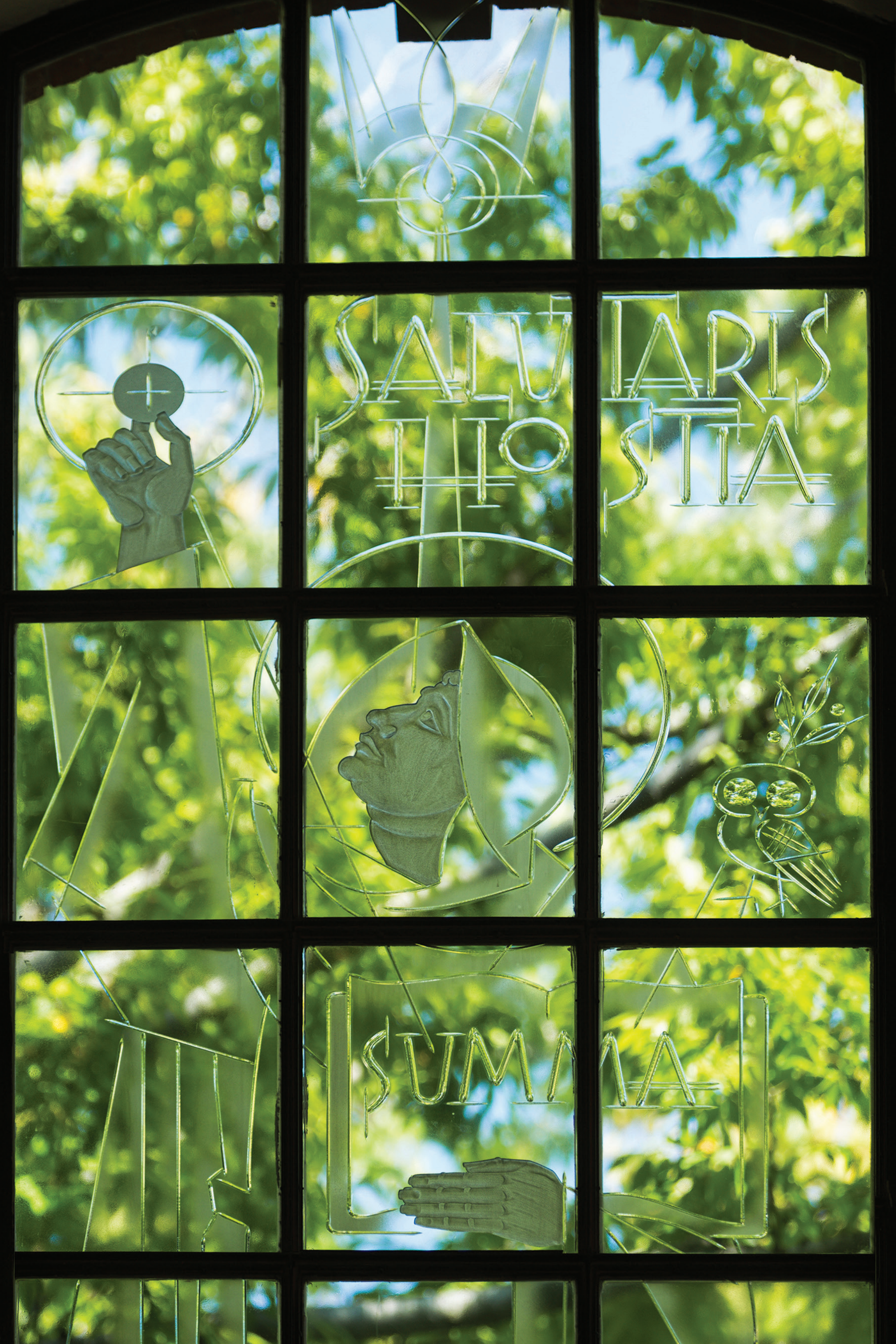
This dominant artistic figure over the altar expresses the community's faith in Jesus Christ as victorious over the world, sin and death. We participate in his death and resurrection and share in his victory when we celebrate the Eucharist beneath this Christogram.

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

(Romans 8:37)



The designer of the crucifix, Robert Amendola, also designed the stations of the cross.


SALUTARIS HOSTIA
SUMMA

Etched Clerestory Windows

The window next to the Lady Chapel depicts Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the patron saint of universities. Wearing the Dominican habit, he looks upward to the Host held high in his right hand. The Host is enclosed in the O of *O Salutaris Hostia* (*"O Saving Victim"*), words from one of his great Eucharistic hymns. His left hand holds a large volume marked *Summa*, the *Summa Theologica,* which was his principal life's work. Beside the saint is an owl, the symbol of Aristotle, with a laurel branch pointing down to the *Summa* in Saint Thomas Aquinas' hand. Above his head is the dove of the Holy Spirit. Beneath his feet is the word *Veritas* ("Truth") written vertically and combined with two hands, right index finger touching left thumb, a symbol of accurate research. The lower panel contains a chalice in reference to Saint Thomas Aquinas' writings on the Eucharist. The chalice is placed within the alpha and omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, in reference to Jesus Christ.

The window second from the Lady Chapel depicts Saint Benedict (480–547), the founder of Western monasticism. He looks upward past his raised right hand that points to an inscription at the top of the window: *Ecce Quam Bonum et Quam Jucundum Habitare Fratres in Unum* ("Behold how good and how joyful it is for brothers to dwell in unity"), a quotation from the psalter used in Saint Benedict's holy rule. In his left hand, he holds a crozier, symbol of his authority as abbot. Below is a crenellated building with towers marked with crosses, representing the monasteries founded according to his rule.

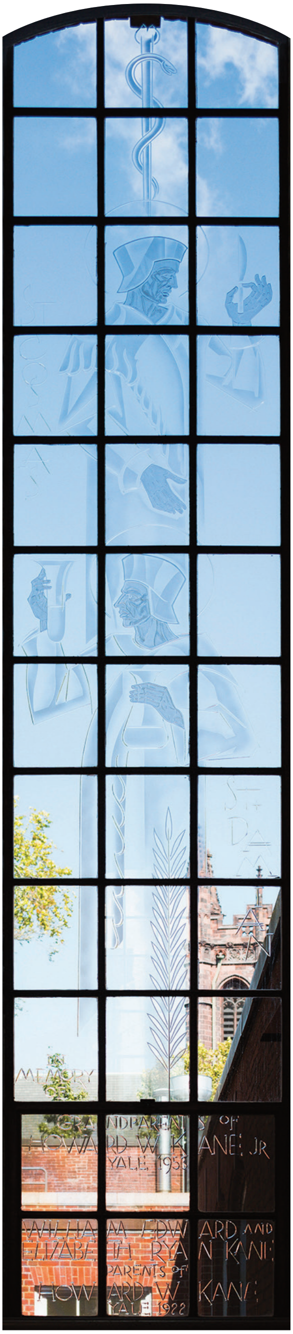


Saint Benedict


SAINT IVES
DOCTOR
UTRIUSQUE JURIS

The next window depicts Saint Ives (1253–1303), patron saint of lawyers and judges. He wears the robe and headdress of the legal profession, and a stole that indicates that he was also a theologian. He holds a deed with a ribboned seal. The inscription *Doctor Utriusque Juris* ("Doctor of Jurisprudence") is his title. Below the figure are a foliated scale of justice and a cross symbolizing Christian equity that blossoms out into flowers of the four cardinal virtues: fortitude, temperance, justice and prudence.

The window nearest the balcony on the north side of the chapel represents Saints Cosmas and Damian (third century), patron saints of medicine and surgery. The twin brothers are dressed in the physician's habit of long fur-trimmed gown and helmet-like cap, and they hold tools of their profession. Saint Cosmas, in the upper portion, lifts high a scalpel, while Saint Damian, in the lower, carries a vial and a beaker. At the top of the window is the rod and serpent, a symbol of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, and thus eventually the symbol of the medical profession.



Saints Cosmas and Damian



Saint Bede

The first clerestory window on the left (or south side) of the chapel depicts **Saint Bede** the Venerable (672–735), the Benedictine monk who was reputed to be the most learned man of his day. Dressed in the habit of his order, he holds a quill pen in his upraised right hand while his left hand rests on a scroll inscribed *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*"Ecclesiastical History"*), his great work. This is the story of Christianity in England, and indeed of England's history, up to his own day. The map of England, with the jagged line of Hadrian's Wall at the top, is marked with crosses indicating historical ecclesiastical sites. The map is titled *Anglia* (*"England"*).

Below the saint's figure is a triangle, symbol of God the Father, enclosing a lamb with a halo, a Christ symbol, while beneath is a swirling flame representing the Holy Spirit. In the bottom section of the window the little castle represents Saint Bede's cell at the Abbey of Jarrow where he spent virtually all of his life. The burning candle in the left half of the structure indicates the long scholarly hours spent in his study. The right half contains a cross, which signifies the abbey's chapel. Together these symbols suggest the scholarship and the faith that filled the life of Saint Bede. The fact that they appear in equal size and juxtaposed under the same roof suggests the Church's tradition that faith and learning exist side by side, and not in conflict.


ANGLIA
HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA


St AUGUSTINE

The second window on the south side pictures Saint Augustine (354–430), Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and one of the first four Doctors of the Church named in 1298. Dressed in priestly vestments, the figure turns sharply to his left with both hands raised as he looks upward at three interlocking circles, symbol of the Holy Trinity. His bishop's mitre appears at the top center of the window. In the lower left half is a large shell from which a stream of water descends, pouring through a round hole and down into the waves that cover the bottom section of the window. This is a reference to the legend of Saint Augustine walking by the sea and finding a small boy digging a hole in the sand and trying to empty the ocean into it. When the saint remarked that this was attempting the impossible, the boy replied, "No more so than for thee to explain the mysteries of the Trinity on which thou art meditating."



Saint Augustine



Saint Gregory the Great

The third window on the south side depicts **Saint Francis of Assisi** (1182–1226). Barefoot and wearing the habit of the Order of Friars Minor, which he founded, the saint looks upward at a seraphic cross from which descend rays to his stigmata, the five wounds of the crucifixion. These were given to him in a seraphic vision two years before his death. Seraphim, angels with six wings, making up the highest of the nine choirs of angels, represent the fire of divine love. A diagonal sweep of birds to whom Saint Francis preached rises from the lower left section of the window. At his feet is a wolf's head, representing the legend of the wild wolf of the town of Gubbio that Saint Francis called "Brother Wolf" and tamed. At the lower left are the words "poverty, chastity, obedience," vows taken by members of the order.

The fourth window on the south side represents **Saint Gregory the Great** (540–604), identified at the top of the window: St. Gregorius Magnus. The saint is represented wearing papal robes and a triple tiara of an early Renaissance type. He raises his right hand in blessing, while with his left he holds a book of music written in Gregorian style with four-lined staff and square notes that represent *Dona Nobis Pacem* (*"Grant Us Peace"*). He collected and edited various plain chants, forming a body of Church music still known as Gregorian Chant. A special attribute is the dove representing the Holy Spirit whispering inspiration for his writings. A scroll beneath the figure reads: "that no slaying of the flesh's life shall dismay his spirit," a quotation from one of his homilies.




+ DICO + TIBI + QUIA +
TU + ES + PETRUS +

The four round windows depict the four evangelists, each writing his gospel with a large quill pen. In the southwest corner, Saint Matthew is accompanied by a small figure of a man, which is his symbol since his gospel begins with the human ancestry of Christ. Below are Christ's words to Peter, taken from his gospel: *Dico Tibi Quia Tu Es Petrus* ("I say to you that you are Peter").

In the northwest corner over the Lady Chapel is Saint John with his symbol, the eagle, which suggests the soaring, inspirational quality of his writing on the divinity of Christ. Below are words from the first chapter of his gospel: *Et Verbum Caro Factum Est* ("and the Word was made flesh"). Beneath Saint John is another of his symbols, a chalice, which refers to the story of an attempt to poison him; when he lifted the cup, the poison emerged from it in the form of a serpent.



Saint John

In the southeast corner over the balcony Saint Mark is looking heavenward as he writes. He is accompanied by a lion, which is his symbol because he begins his gospel with the mission of Saint John the Baptist, the "voice of one crying in the wilderness" that is associated with the roar of the lion. Below are the words of the centurion after the crucifixion, *Hic Homo Filius Dei Erat* ("This man was the Son of God"), that occur in Mark's gospel.

In the northeast corner over the balcony is Saint Luke with his right hand holding the quill and raised in blessing, his left holding his gospel. At his left side is the winged ox, a sacrificial animal, which is Luke's symbol because of his emphasis on the sacrifice and atonement of Christ. Below are found words taken from Luke's account of Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus: *Cognoverunt Eum in Fractione Panis* ("they knew him in the breaking of bread").



Saint Luke


HIC +
FILIUS + DEI +



EZE KIEL
RADIX JESSE

Tree of Jesse

High on the east wall, over the balcony, is a modern representation of the Tree of Jesse. Traditionally the Tree of Jesse portrays the genealogy of Christ and is based on Isaiah 11:1–2: "and there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him...." At the bottom of the panel lies the sleeping Jesse, a strong vine growing from his chest and expanding into branches, each bearing the figure of an ancestor of Christ. Those depicted here are Isaiah, Ezekiel, David with his harp, and at the top John the Baptist pointing to the crowned figures of Mary and Jesus. Across the top of the panel are seven doves, representing the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, sending rays down upon the Child.



Jesse



Stations of the Cross



Station XI

Robert Amendola's stations have a special insight that is intended to personalize the worshipper's relationship to Jesus in His passion and death. The Stations of the Cross are made of hammered lead and copper and were cut *in situ* ("on site").

Except for the figure of Mary in the fourth station, no person except Christ appears; all other persons and incidents are represented through the actions of hands with associated artifacts. He is not judged by Pilate, but by a pair of hands. A sea of faces do not call for His crucifixion, but many anonymously accusing fingers. Most affectingly, He is scourged and nailed by a pair of hands, not by Roman soldiers. The personal involvement of every sinner in Christ's suffering is inescapable in this unconventional, truly creative and modern work.






ARCHANGEL
MICHAEL
ARCHANGEL
GABRIEL

Prayer Alcove

A former confessional was converted into a new prayer alcove at the rear of the chapel, set into the wood-paneled depth of the wall and intended to provide a focus for private devotion. Its hinged wood rail also reintroduced to the chapel the zinc-plated, cast-brass balusters that originally composed the altar rail but were removed from the sanctuary in post-Vatican II renovations.



Jesus Christ Pantocrator



Chandeliers



John Melville Bee

Important punctuation points in the chapel's lofty space were its chandeliers. At an unhappy moment in the chapel's history, these extraordinary figments of the 1930s scientific imagination — their glass originally blown by John Melville Bee — had been entirely removed to the chapel's basement, where they spent decades in disarray and disrepair.

In an act of faith, the remaining pieces were reassembled, cataloged, reconstructed in brass and copper, burnished to their original glow, and reinstated in their full glory, their curved surfaces refracting rays of light across the painted masonry of the walls.



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This updated version of *Symbolism: Saint Thomas More Chapel* was published to commemorate the blessing of the new crucifix by Archbishop Leonard P. Blair, Archdiocese of Hartford, CT.

The chapel community is grateful to Marty and Gerry Conway '53 for their leadership gift in support of the new crucifix, a beautiful work of art created by Giuseppe Maraniello.

With contributions from Kate Hemingway Keefe†, author of pamphlet: *Symbolism in Saint Thomas More Chapel*; George Knight, of Knight Architecture L.L.C., architect of the 2008 chapel renovation project; Peter C. Alegi, '56 '59 LL.B., author of senior essay: *A History of Catholicism at Yale to 1943*; and Giuseppe Maraniello, sculptor of the newly commissioned crucifix.

All photography, except pages 2, 8 and the John Melville Bee image on 38, © Robert Lisak.

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